



GENDER DYNAMICS IN INDIAN DIPLOMACY: EXPLORING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

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Abstract: In India, despite the reverence for female deities, patriarchy's hold remains strong in various fields, including diplomacy. This research aims to explore the pivotal role of women within the sphere of Indian diplomacy, tracing the historical evolution. The study relies on the qualitative method of survey of literature and analysis to highlight the achievements of Indian women diplomats and persisting hurdles, including the intersectional challenges they face. The study posits that addressing and removing the gender bias in Indian diplomacy, by viewing it through a feminist lens will yield more equitable opportunities and inclusivity. It underscores the significance of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), introduced by Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallstrom in 2014, as a potential solution to dismantle the patriarchal bias in Indian diplomacy. Empowering women to transcend the constraints imposed by a patriarchal framework, can enhance their individual well-being and psychological fortitude, fostering an improved work culture that attracts more women to join the Indian diplomatic services. This study gives suggestive measures to improve the work-life balance and enrich the professional as well as personal lives of women in Indian diplomacy by adopting feminist ideals. The research will contribute to the broader scholarship on gender and diplomacy, which is a relatively nascent but rapidly growing research area.

Keywords: gender, diplomacy, Indian women diplomats, intersectionality, feminist foreign policy.

ISSN 2283-7949
GLOCALISM: JOURNAL OF CULTURE, POLITICS AND INNOVATION
DOI: 10.54103/gjcpi.2024.22564



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INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy, a pivotal component of foreign policy, involves the delicate management of negotiations, agreements, and relations among multiple parties. It encompasses the non-coercive advancement of a state's foreign policy objectives, executed by politicians, diplomats, or private individuals acting on behalf of a nation-state (Berridge 2002). Diplomatic efforts contribute to arbitration and mediation, particularly in resolving inter-state disputes through the use of soft power to foster international peace. Moreover, diplomacy plays a crucial role in fostering political, economic, and cultural connections between nations. Despite the widespread association of women with peace and diplomacy, there persists a striking underrepresentation of women in diplomatic roles, as noted by Fred Halliday, a Professor of International Relations (IR) at the London School of Economics, in the 1980s (Dhar 2022).

In the context of India, since 1947, only four out of 28 Indian ambassadors to the United States have been women (Dhar 2022). The imposition of a marriage clause within the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) compelled two female diplomats to resign, including Rama Mehta, the wife of the late foreign secretary Jagat Mehta (Mukherjee 2021). Notably, in 1976, unmarried officers received half the foreign allowance compared to their married counterparts (Mukherjee 2021). The discriminatory practices sparked significant discourse, particularly with the emergence of waves of feminism globally. In response, there was a notable call in the 1980s by Americans to appoint more women to senior foreign policy roles, leading to the establishment of the Women's Foreign Policy Council. The *United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security* in 2000 facilitated the inclusion of women in conflict resolution, peace operations, and the integration of gender perspectives into the traditionally "hard" and masculinised domain of international security (Tryggestad 2009).

The existing literature on gender dynamics in diplomacy emphasises women's participation and impact yet lacks in-depth research on challenges faced by Indian women diplomats and the application of feminist foreign policy in India. This

study aims to fill these gaps using a robust theoretical framework grounded in feminist international relations theory and intersectionality in gender studies.

Methodologically, the study relies on a comprehensive review of official documents, government reports, and policy directives, supplemented by a meticulous examination of secondary sources encompassing academic journals and books. Employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks to illuminate the challenges and opportunities pertinent to gender dynamics within Indian diplomacy. The primary research method used is content analysis, which is analytical and exploratory. The analytical lens of Feminist International Relations Theory (FIRT) offers a nuanced understanding of the complex terrain of gender relations within the context of Indian diplomatic practice. The concept of intersectionality in gender studies highlights the amplified challenges and disadvantages encountered by women in Indian diplomacy. Through this interdisciplinary inquiry, the study aims to furnish a holistic perspective, thereby enriching scholarly discourse and informing policy interventions in this crucial domain.

The study explores the research questions such as, what progress the women in Indian diplomacy made over the years? What are the challenges that persist for women in Indian diplomacy and how they can be overcome? What are the opportunities that lie ahead for women in Indian diplomacy, and how has the adoption of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) by some countries affected India? However, the research lacks a comparative analysis with other countries' diplomatic systems, hindering a comprehensive understanding of women's experiences in Indian diplomacy.

In Indian diplomacy, challenges and opportunities for women are evident. Despite progress towards gender equality, women's representation in key diplomatic roles and decision-making remains limited. Structural hurdles like gender bias, networking constraints, and stereotypes impede their advancement. Nonetheless, there are avenues for improvement. Advocating for inclusive and gender-aware diplomatic practices, the feminist framework encourages policies that bolster women's involvement and leadership. It stresses amplifying marginalised women's voices, especially from diverse backgrounds. On a



positive note, there has been a rise in women's representation in the IFS, the figure has increased from 25% to 40% among new batches in the past decade (Khillare 2023), which indicates progress in gender mainstreaming within foreign policy. However, the adoption of FFP in the future can open new doors of opportunities for women in Indian diplomacy.

The study delineates four sections detailing the journey of women in diplomacy. The first section explores the evolution of women in diplomacy. The second section focuses on women in Indian diplomacy, highlighting their challenges and achievements. The subsequent section highlights the opportunities for women in Indian diplomacy and gives an overview of the FFP. The last section presents the key findings and policy recommendations for embracing a feminist perspective in Indian diplomacy. The conclusion sums up the efforts made by the government and NGOs to dismantle patriarchal constraints while underscoring the need for a comprehensive policy framework to address the existing challenges and improve opportunities for women in Indian diplomacy.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Gender studies is an interdisciplinary field examining gender identity and representation, addressing socially constructed differences and power imbalances between men and women. Gender is understood as a social construct influenced by cultural, age, race, economic, and political contexts. These gender relations shape societal norms and institutional practices. Historically, women's exclusion from institutional processes has limited their influence on operations and policies (Nagasha et al. 2019).

This research is grounded in the framework of FIRT, which critically analyses global power dynamics influenced by patriarchy, racism, nationalism, imperialism, and militarism, contributing to systemic vulnerabilities and marginalisation. It prioritises advancing gender equality and women's rights in diplomatic interactions, especially in post-colonial contexts (Tripathi 2023). FIRT broadens its focus beyond women's issues, examining gender power relations that shape global politics. By fore-

grounding women within IR, feminist theories challenge traditional IR paradigms, advocating for a comprehensive gender-inclusive lens (Abdulsada Ali 2023). FIRT critiques predominant IR paradigms that prioritise state actors, underscoring the need to address women's experiences and perspectives (Enloe 2014).

In India, while the concept of women's movement dates back much earlier, the term feminism is relatively modern and encompasses various movements, theories and philosophies aiming at gender equality. Within IR, the feminist perspective emphasises transnational solidarity to confront common challenges and advance social justice (Pande 2018). It emphasises the value of transnational feminist networks and movements, recognising the interconnected nature of women's challenges worldwide. It underscores the necessity for unified efforts to tackle shared obstacles, emphasising cross-border solidarity and collaboration as crucial for advancing gender equality and social justice (Cherian 2023).

The concept of intersectionality was introduced by civil rights activist Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, in her analysis of how black women face discrimination based on both their gender and race (Sharkey, Hawk 2016). Intersectionality can be defined as "the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" (Sharkey, Hawk 2016). The term "white feminism" refers to a form of feminism that disregards intersectionality, thus overshadowing the challenges faced by women of colour, LGBTQ women, and other women from minority groups. Incorporating the concept of intersectionality into feminism ensures the movement's inclusivity, enabling the voices of women from diverse racial, economic, religious, identity, and orientation backgrounds to be heard. Intersectional feminism acknowledges the various ways in which each woman experiences discrimination (Sharkey, Hawk 2016).

Critics of feminist research in IR raise concerns about the practical challenges of integrating gender studies into traditional IR frameworks. Despite challenges in integrating gender studies into traditional IR frameworks, feminist research in IR

has questioned normative assumptions and highlighted gendered power dynamics, advocating for inclusivity and diversity in understanding global politics (Abdulsada Ali 2023).

This study explores feminism in IR and delves into the complex realm of gender roles within the landscape of Indian diplomacy. It examines the barriers faced by women, the progress made by them, and the potential for transformative change in diplomatic practices to achieve gender equality. By exploring these dimensions, the study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in diplomacy and advocate for policies that promote equal participation and empowerment of women in this critical sphere.

TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Diplomacy in literary records is projected as an art to be practiced by males with trained intuitions (Aggestam, Towns 2019). The literature mentioning women in diplomacy broadly falls into three categories; the first one mentions the diplomatic histories of women, the second one outlines the descriptive case studies of individual officers, which throws light on the journey of women diplomatic officers through a gender lens and the third strand elaborates the causes and effects of the inclusion of women in diplomacy (Alexander et al. 2018).

Research indicates that in the pre-nineteenth-century era, women held significant roles as formal diplomats and ambassadors (Alexander et al. 2018). They influenced diplomacy informally by using their position as a mother, sister, lover, wife or friend to steal information or influence the ones in formal positions (Alexander et al. 2018). Historically, those women who expressed their will to take part in diplomacy were portrayed as lacking maternal instinct and intended to seek illegitimate influence using their aristocratic connections (McCarthy, Southern 2017). The diplomatic wife was eventually institutionalised in twentieth-century diplomacy, but her labour was unpaid and unrecognised (Alexander et al. 2018). In the 1980s, women were usually given consular posts and more crucial policy-oriented posts were mainly occupied by men (Enloe 2014). Moreover, women got very less opportunities to attend international conferences.



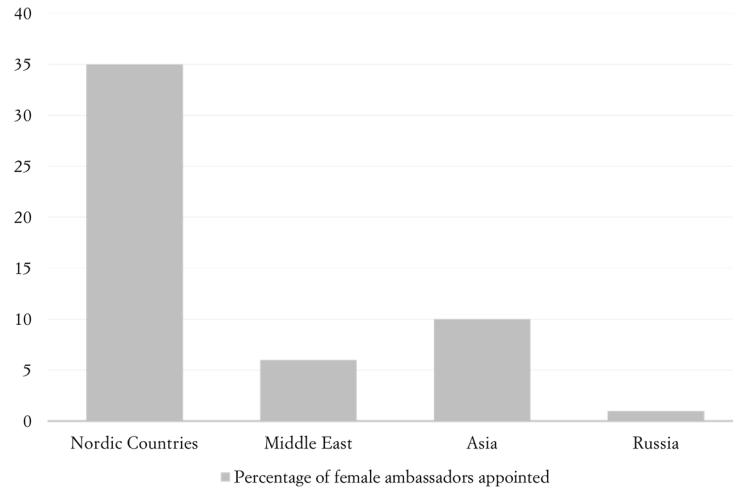


Fig. 1. *Percentage of female ambassadors appointed by countries.*

Source: Towns, Niklasson 2017.

According to research conducted by Town and Niklasson in 2014, analysing 7.000 ambassadors from the top 50 countries based on GDP rankings, the findings indicate a stark gender disparity in high-status positions, with significantly fewer women occupying these roles compared to men (Towns, Niklasson 2017). The marriage ban, due to which women diplomats had to choose between marriage or their profession, was not lifted until the 1970s in many countries (Aggestam, Towns 2018: 281). Even in Canada and Norway, which are gender-equal and feminist states, women have to face more challenges and obstacles as compared to their male counterparts (Alexander et al. 2018). At various diplomatic levels, 19% of representatives from African states, 13% from Asian-Pacific, 14% from Eastern European, 30% from Latin American and Caribbean, and 20% from Western European and other states were women in 2013 (Rossetti 2015). The share of female ambassadors stands very low at 15% (Towns, Niklasson 2017). Figure 1 depicts the percentage of female ambassadors appointed by various countries.

Representation of women in states like Finland (44%); Sweden (40%); and the United States (30%) (Towns, Niklasson 2017) is still decent but globally, men constituted 85% of

ambassadors, and from 1990 to 2017, women made up only 9% of negotiators (Aggestam, Svensson 2018).

Women have been burdened with family responsibilities that come their way from being promoted to ambassador or other high positions and since it is presumed that men have innate masculine traits like rationalism, assertiveness etc and females are more feminine, mother-like, soft and caring, therefore men are considered better choice for such high diplomatic posts (Towns, Niklasson 2017). Although the naturalist argument that depicts women as inherently feminine and men as inherently masculine has been deconstructed by anthropologists and sociologists, gender-biased thinking prevails (Buscatto, Fusulier 2013).

In the realm of diplomacy, a persistent masculine culture, apathetic to issues of sex and gender, presents additional challenges for women. The situation can be disastrous in case there is a verbal or physical assault on women diplomats in a male-dominated political environment (Minarova-Banjac 2018). In 2017, it was all over the news that a British diplomat, Rebecca Dykes was found dead. She was “raped and strangled” while on her overseas mission in Lebanon (Iake, Wells 2017). Therefore, it is required that strong social and legal frameworks should be provided, and incentives should be given to women diplomats working in dangerous regions.

The problems become even more grave when interconnected with other identities like race, class, ability etc. giving rise to intersectionality. A solution can't be reached by just adding the word “feminist” to diplomacy, but more profound change is needed to fight the patriarchal bias. Ensuring quality education for women is one such change. Women correspond to about two-thirds of the illiterates globally (Fritsche 2002). The literacy rates among younger adults are increasing due to better enrolment rates among girls even in sub-Saharan African and South Asian countries (Fritsche 2002).

Globally, there are only 2% to 3% women working as chief mediators (Aggestam, Svensson 2018). A particular power structure has been established by the traditional norms of diplomacy which are masculine and these organisational arrangements have largely been impermeable to feminist perspectives (Minarova-Banjac 2018: 22). The reason given for the exclusion

of women from negotiation is that women have traits like passivity and submission, which are not conducive to negotiating, but contrary to this, feminine traits like empathy are very crucial for successful negotiations (Paddock, Kray 2011).

According to the United Nations Institute for Training And Research (UNITAR), which specifically focuses on the absence of women in diplomacy, the exclusion of women is an “inefficiency problem” because if women participate in foreign policy decisions, this can increase economic growth (UNITAR – United Nations Institute for Training And Research, 2018).

Until 2002, there was an absence of women in the post of special representatives of the secretary-general and even as special envoys (Fritsche 2002). Western organisations and companies, such as the World Bank, Nike, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and individual governments of states have also considered gender inequality issues by stating that the participation of women, especially in the Global South, in sports diplomacy will empower them and their communities (Hayhurst 2011). However, some researchers argue that the diplomacy and women’s empowerment narrative is commonly used to justify hegemonic neoliberal development discourses that depend upon and reinforce gender inequality to sustain global capital accumulation (Dyer 2015).

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to designate June 24, 2022, as the International Day of Women in Diplomacy (Hindustan Times News Desk 2022). While introducing the resolution, Thilmeeza Hussain, Maldives Ambassador to the United Nations, said:

As women climb the diplomatic ranks, they are outnumbered by their male peers, including at United Nations Headquarters, where they represent only one-fifth of the permanent representative (Hindustan Times News Desk 2022).

The United Nations reaffirmed that to achieve sustainable development, democracy and peace, the participation of women must be on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making (Hindustan Times News Desk 2022). Active participation of women in politics and policymaking indicates their political empowerment (United Nation Development Programme 2015).

THE TRAJECTORY OF WOMEN IN INDIAN DIPLOMACY: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

In 1947, amid the nascent stages of India's diplomatic landscape, a pivotal moment arose when the esteemed Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, displayed remarkable foresight and progressive thinking. Despite encountering opposition from Sir Hugh Weightman, then secretary of the External Affairs Department, Nehru fervently advocated for the integration of women into the foreign service domain (Rathore 2020). This landmark stance underscored Nehru's commitment to fostering gender inclusivity within governmental institutions. Nehru's proposal, while acknowledging the logistical challenges surrounding the deployment of women officers to remote corners of the globe, nonetheless championed their inclusion in a measured capacity (Rathore 2020). By advocating for limited but strategic placements, Nehru sought to ensure that talented female professionals could contribute meaningfully to India's diplomatic endeavours, albeit within parameters conducive to their circumstances (Rathore 2020). This historical episode not only highlights Nehru's progressive vision but also underscores the importance of diversity and gender equality in shaping the trajectory of India's diplomatic corps. Nehru's advocacy set a precedent for subsequent efforts aimed at expanding opportunities for women within the foreign service, thereby enriching the profession with a broader spectrum of perspectives and talents.

C.B. Muthamma joined the IFS in 1949 and that started the journey of women in foreign services in India, which was not a cakewalk (Mukherjee 2021). She had to go to the court of law many times, including once when she was not given a deserved promotion to the Secretary level in the foreign service (Mukherjee 2021). She challenged Rule 8(2) of the Indian Foreign Service (Conduct and Discipline) Rules of 1961 and Rule 18(4) of the Indian Foreign Service (Recruitment, Cadre Seniority and Promotion) Rules of 1961, which were derogatory to women diplomats as these rules gave the government the right to remove women IFS officers from the service if their performance as a diplomat was being hampered by them being married, or if they chose to get married after joining the service (Singh 2021). Strangely, there was no such rule for their male counterparts.

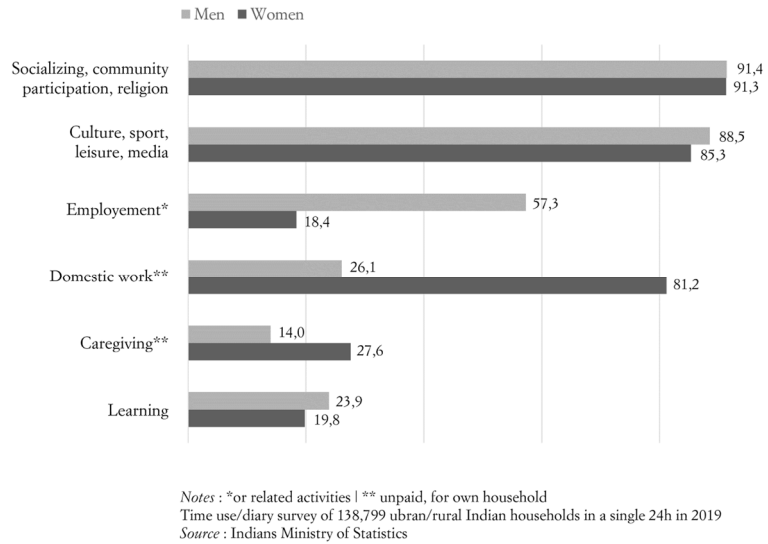


Fig. 2. Work and home divided among gender lines in India. Share of urban and rural person participating in the following activities in a day in India (in %).

Source: Image adapted with permission from “Statista” (Buchholz 2023).

In 2001, Chokila Iyer became the first female foreign secretary of India. Only two more women have been promoted to the highest office in the service after her: Nirupama Menon Rao (2009-2011) and Sujatha Singh (2013-2015). Beno Zephine became the first 100% visually challenged person from India to become an IFS Officer in 2014 (Mukherjee 2021). Women have proved their mettle in war-torn countries like Afghanistan, Libya and the Middle East (Mukherjee 2021). Deepthi Jharwal, IFS was the only woman diplomat in the team meeting Taliban leaders in Kabul in 2022, which was a good achievement and progress for women’s representation (Laskar 2022).

Indian women diplomats have made significant strides in overcoming the barriers of patriarchy and gender bias within the IFS. This advancement is attributable to concerted efforts by both the Government of India and various NGOs aimed at empowering women through enhanced educational opportuni-

ties, financial support, and social upliftment initiatives. Consequently, there has been a notable surge in the representation of women in the IFS, with figures climbing from 25% to 40% over the past decade.

The pressure of maintaining a work-life balance by women diplomats was recognised by the report submitted by a committee on civil services reform set up in 2004, under P.C. Hota, former chairperson of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). The additional burden on women diplomats due to their domestic responsibilities required them to have additional benefits, which were granted to them after the report, for instance, over and above the leaves applicable for all, an additional leave of four years with full pay was granted for women in their entire service career. The statistical data illustrated in figure 2 highlights the increased workload experienced by women as a result of domestic responsibilities, in contrast to their male counterparts.

Women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds face intersectional obstacles during the examination preparation phase, which impede their entry into the prestigious civil services. These challenges manifest as financial constraints that prevent access to coaching or guidance, coupled with familial expectations that prioritise marriage immediately after completing college. Intersectionality significantly influences the presence and prominence of women diplomats, particularly those from marginalised caste and religious backgrounds, who encounter added obstacles in accessing training, mentorship, and prominent roles in diplomacy. This lack of representation not only inhibits their career advancement but also restricts the diversity of viewpoints in diplomatic dialogues and negotiations. Intersectionality among Indian women diplomats involves examining how gender, class, caste and religious discrimination intersect. This perspective is crucial for understanding the experiences of women who face discrimination due to their intersectional identities, impacting their career prospects, financial status, and diplomatic navigation. Specifically, the convergence of caste and gender introduces unique hardships, exemplified by the “double jeopardy” phenomenon experienced by Dalit women in India (Dahiya 2021).

India's reservation system constitutes an additional layer of discrimination, intensifying intersectional challenges for women, particularly affecting Muslim and Christian communities. This system allocates seats in local and national legislatures, educational institutions, and civil service positions to members of India's low-caste and tribal communities. However, the reservations for low-caste individuals are restricted to Hindus. Additionally, the laws governing marriage, divorce, and adoption in India are not uniform but rather specific to each religion. This inconsistency occasionally emerges as a contentious political issue, especially concerning Muslims, whose personal law lacks certain protections for married women and divorcees that are included in the Hindu personal law code. Poor financial status worsens the situation (Bauman 2016). Understanding intersectionality requires addressing the intricate dynamics of gender, class, and caste discrimination within Indian diplomacy. By doing so, opportunities for Indian women diplomats can become more inclusive and equitable, irrespective of their caste or religious affiliations.

India's cultural and political pluralism is under siege, impacting gender dynamics in diplomacy. The legacy of imperialism, evident in British rule's divide-and-rule policy, continues to influence India's communal politics, affecting gender equality and religious rights (Datar 2017). Social codes of elite belonging and the politics of universality reinforce gender distinctions in diplomacy, highlighting the need for inclusive analytical tools. Efforts for gender equity in politics encounter hurdles from deep-rooted cultural norms (Bhowmick 2023). Instances of intolerance and hostility by the majority community towards minorities in a particular area are on the rise. Legislative representation is vital but must be coupled with grassroots empowerment to create lasting change. While increased female representation can shift attitudes, true empowerment requires societal transformation. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach integrating legislative representation with grassroots empowerment measures.

The women diplomats, despite remarkable achievements, continue to grapple with the challenge of achieving a harmonious work-life balance. The lingering patriarchal norms pervasive in Indian society place a disproportionate burden on



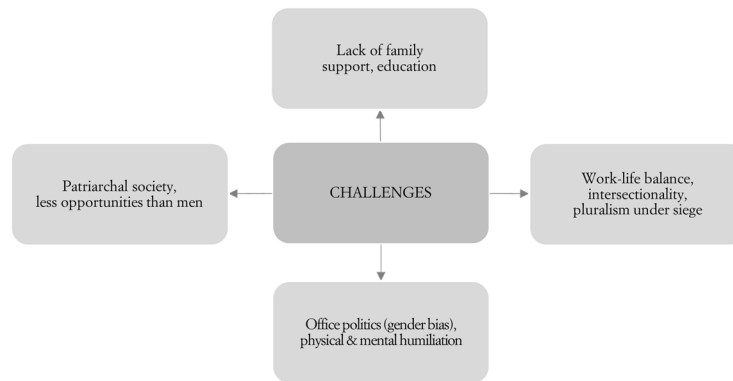


Fig. 3. *Challenges faced by women in Indian diplomacy.*

women, who are often expected to shoulder the primary responsibilities of managing household chores and childcare. This imbalance creates significant hurdles for women striving to navigate the demands of their professional careers alongside their obligations. Figure 3 summarises the problems and challenges faced by Indian women diplomats.

Indian women diplomats: breaking barriers and making strides

Indian women diplomats have achieved remarkable milestones by making noteworthy contributions on the global platform and leaving behind a legacy of leadership. From Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the first woman President of the United Nations General Assembly, to Nirupama Rao, the first female foreign secretary of India, women diplomats have exemplified resilience, excellence and leadership in international relations. Chokila Iyer, a 1964 batch IFS Officer was appointed as India's first female foreign secretary. She has also held distinguished posts like a member of the UPSC (Press Information Bureau 2005). Nirupama Rao, a 1973 batch IFS officer, became the first woman spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs in 2001 and the first Indian lady to become ambassador to China

(Bhaumik, Arun 2009). Ruchira Kamboj, a 1987 batch IFS officer got appointed as India's first permanent representative to the United Nations in 2022 (Hindustan Times News Desk 2022). Poulomi Tripathi, a 2007 batch IFS officer and a former counsellor in India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations earned praises for calling out fake news as the then Pakistan ambassador showed a picture of a girl from Palestine to the assembly and claimed that it was from Kashmir (Hindustan Times New Desk 2022). Sneha Dubey, a 2012 batch IFS officer came into the limelight when she hit out at Pakistan for sheltering terrorists and maintained that Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh are integral parts of India at the United Nations General Assembly (Hindustan Times New Desk 2022).

Case study

Examining the specific case of Mrs. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, a distinguished diplomat, it can be seen that she has been a trailblazer in Indian diplomacy. She entered the IFS in 1979, embarking on a journey that would redefine gender norms in diplomacy. Throughout her illustrious career spanning over three decades, Mrs. Deepa shattered glass ceilings and left an indelible mark on Indian diplomacy. Despite facing gender bias, Mrs. Deepa persevered, challenging stereotypes and excelling in her field. Noteworthy posts include serving as India's first woman ambassador to Qatar (2009-12), Japan (2012-15), and Sweden (2005-09) (Outlook Magazine 2019).

Mrs. Deepa's journey was not without challenges. During interviews, she encountered questions about marriage, reflecting prevalent gender biases in the bureaucratic sphere. Undeterred by obstacles, Mrs. Deepa advocated against quotas for women in bureaucracy, emphasising meritocracy over tokenism. She believed in harnessing women's unique strengths in diplomacy, rejecting notions of hyper-feminism. Mrs. Deepa's assertiveness and confidence were evident as she proudly wore a saree, a symbol of Indian culture, in male-dominated diplomatic settings. Her career trajectory reflects not only perseverance and resilience but also a steadfast commitment to challenging gender norms and advocating for equal treatment in the

diplomatic arena. Mrs. Deepa's legacy serves as an inspiration for future generations of women diplomats, reminding them of the power of determination and the importance of carving out their paths in traditionally male-dominated fields (Outlook Magazine 2019).

Critical analysis of the case study

The case of Mrs. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa highlights both challenges and opportunities for women in Indian diplomacy. Entering the IFS in 1979, Mrs. Wadhwa faced significant gender biases, including being questioned about marriage during interviews. Such biases reflect systemic barriers that women encounter in the bureaucratic sphere. Despite these challenges, Mrs. Wadhwa opposed quotas for women, emphasising meritocracy and advocating for harnessing women's unique strengths in diplomacy over tokenism. Her trailblazing roles as the first woman ambassador to Qatar, Japan, and Sweden exemplify the potential for women to excel in high-profile diplomatic positions, challenging traditional gender norms and inspiring future generations. By confidently wearing a saree in male-dominated settings, Mrs. Wadhwa asserted her cultural identity and professional confidence, highlighting the importance of diverse perspectives in diplomacy.

Mrs. Wadhwa's career underscores perseverance, resilience, and the importance of self-advocacy in overcoming barriers. Her legacy serves as an inspiration for women diplomats, demonstrating that determination can redefine gender dynamics in diplomacy. Her approach, balancing merit-based advancement with recognition of women's distinct contributions, sets a precedent for gender equality in the field. To summarise, Mrs. Wadhwa's journey encapsulates the complexities of gender dynamics in Indian diplomacy. While highlighting the ongoing challenges like gender biases and systemic barriers, it also showcases the opportunities for women to lead and innovate. Her story underscores the progress made and the need for continued efforts to achieve true gender parity in diplomacy.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN INDIAN DIPLOMACY

There exist numerous opportunities for women within the realm of Indian diplomacy, provided India undertakes concerted efforts to dismantle patriarchal biases. A pivotal measure in this direction could entail the adoption of a feminist foreign policy. This strategic move not only has the potential to position India as a beacon of progressive diplomacy within South Asian countries and international organisations but also underscores India's commitment to advancing gender equality on a global scale. Notably, India has already taken strides in this direction by implementing gender-sensitive strategies and incorporating feminist frameworks into its diplomatic initiatives.

Gender-sensitive strategies and feminist frameworks in Indian diplomacy

In diplomatic contexts, power plays a pivotal role in shaping international relations dynamics. Historically, diplomacy has been dominated by men, leading to the marginalisation or exclusion of women from higher-status roles (Kreft et al. 2022). The nexus between gender and power is notably crucial in Indian diplomacy, highlighting inherent gendered patterns and inequalities within this domain. For instance, male ambassadors are disproportionately assigned to economically significant states, illustrating a pattern of gender-based hierarchy in prestigious diplomatic roles (Kreft et al. 2022). Nevertheless, recent research suggests that gender dynamics in diplomacy are not fixed but adaptable over different contexts and periods (Kreft et al. 2022).

India has significantly increased women's representation in diplomatic roles, reaching 21,6% among diplomats and ministerial staff by 2022 (Indian Council of World Affairs 2021). Initiatives like the Women in Security, Conflict Management, and Peace (WISCOMP) program demonstrate India's focus on women's empowerment in diplomacy, aiming to boost their involvement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Indian Council of World Affairs 2021). This commitment is further ev-



idenced by India's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its active pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) 5, which centres on gender equality (Rao 2021).

The South Asian Feminist Foreign Policy (SAFFP) aims to foster cross-border solidarity against gender-based discrimination, advance women's economic empowerment, and enhance women's participation in peace negotiations, reflecting a commitment to gender equality in diplomacy (Rao 2021). India's recent election as a member of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in September 2020 and its assumption of the Presidency of the G20 starting from December 2022 have sparked discussions about India's potential to make significant strides in its international relations. These developments underscore the positive influence of gender-sensitive policies on India's global reputation (Rao 2021).

At the domestic level, government initiatives like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* and *Sukanya Samridhi Yojana*, among numerous other policies have been instrumental in providing incentives and fostering women's education. These efforts are aimed at mitigating the challenges confronted by women stemming from the intersectionality of gender and adverse socio-economic conditions. During India's G20 Presidency, the notion of "women-led development" underscored the crucial role of women in guiding decision-making in both diplomatic and developmental endeavours. This approach showcases the effective adoption of gender-sensitive policies in Indian diplomacy, resulting in enhanced female representation, empowerment programs, advocacy for gender equality, collaborative transnational initiatives, and global acknowledgment of India's dedication to gender equality in diplomatic practices (Cardoz 2023).

Feminist Foreign Policy

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) is a paradigmatic shift in the traditional approaches to state interaction on the global stage, fundamentally grounded in principles of gender equality and the empowerment of marginalised groups, particularly women

(Thompson, Clement 2019). Emerging as a response to the inadequacies of conventional foreign policies in addressing systemic inequalities, FFP seeks to dismantle patriarchal power structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and subjugation (Thompson, Clement 2019). FFP entails a comprehensive reallocation of resources toward achieving gender parity and fostering inclusive development (Thompson, Clement 2019).

Central to the ethos of FFP is its commitment to amplifying the voices and agency of feminist activists and movements, recognising their indispensable role in driving social and political transformation (Thompson, Clement 2019). By integrating feminist perspectives into diplomatic frameworks and policy formulation processes, states espousing FFP strive to cultivate partnerships and alliances that prioritise the advancement of women's rights and the promotion of gender justice on a global scale.

Moreover, FFP extends beyond the realm of policy rhetoric, advocating for concrete actions and initiatives aimed at challenging entrenched norms and practices that perpetuate gender-based violence, economic disparities, and social exclusion. Through diplomatic engagements, development assistance programs, and multilateral cooperation efforts, proponents of FFP endeavour to foster a more equitable and inclusive international order, where the rights and dignity of all individuals are upheld and respected.

FFP has a global impact by promoting post-colonial and anti-racist foreign policies while tackling intersectional discrimination. FFP prioritises gender equality, human rights, and representation, shaping a more inclusive and equitable global landscape through fair and just policy decisions in foreign affairs (United Nations Women 2023). In essence, FFP represents a transformative approach to foreign policy that transcends the traditional state-centric paradigm, foregrounding the imperative of gender equality and social justice in the pursuit of peace, security, and development on a global scale. As nations grapple with complex geopolitical challenges and evolving threats to human rights, the principles and practices of FFP offer a compelling framework for building a more just and equitable world order¹.

In the year 2014, the foreign minister of Sweden, Margot Wallstrom, announced the world's first explicitly feminist foreign policy. Sweden's framework consists of the three Rs: Rights



of women, Resources and increased Representation of females (Thompson, Clement 2019). The drawback was that this policy was focused on women and the needs of the LGBTQ community were largely ignored (Thompson, Clement 2019). In June 2017, the world's first feminist international assistance policy (FIAP) was launched by Canada (Thompson, Clement 2019). FIAP focuses on six areas of priority for women which are: gender equality, human dignity, women's economic empowerment, climate action, women's political participation, and women, peace and security (Thompson, Clement 2019). In 2018, France adopted the international strategy on gender equality. France has an accountability framework to track progress (Thompson, Clement 2019). Many more countries like Mexico, Spain, Luxembourg, Germany and Chile have joined the league and are setting examples for other countries to move forward in the same direction.

An intersectional analysis of identity differs from single-determinant identity models, which obscure the reality that women in various social and geographic contexts encounter distinct challenges (Kang et al. 2017). Since each country possesses its own traditions and historical context, the feminist foreign policy of one nation may not necessarily be directly applicable or replicable for another nation. This implies that the Western nation's concept of such a policy can't be applied to the Global South. Mexico, as the first Global South nation to adopt an FFP in 2020, serves as a notable example. India can gain valuable insights from Mexico's FFP implementation to address concerns about the scope and execution of its own FFP. The Mexican experience is particularly relevant due to shared challenges like entrenched patriarchal norms, income disparities, and systemic corruption. Mexico's FFP focuses on promoting gender parity in political representation and policy formulation, including measures like quotas for women's participation in politics and government roles. Moreover, Mexico actively engages women in addressing key issues such as "climate change" and "LGBTQ+ rights" (Khullar 2022).

Mexico adopted a comprehensive strategy involving collaboration across different sectors to tackle gender-specific challenges related to climate change, trade, immigration, and human rights. One notable initiative is the pro-equality project,

which seeks to strengthen international backing for women's rights agreements and enhance women's engagement in global forums. Additionally, Mexico's push for a gender action plan within its climate policies reflects a nuanced understanding of how gender dynamics intersect with broader policy frameworks. These coordinated endeavours have led to notable enhancements in gender representation in Mexico's legislative and governmental spheres, establishing Mexico as a prominent advocate for gender equality globally and promoting a more inclusive and fair society (Khullar 2022).

India's historical trajectory in foreign policy has been characterised by a notable commitment to progressive principles. Amidst the Cold War era's stark polarisation led by the United States and the Soviet Union, India pioneered the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as a manifestation of its independent stance. This diplomatic initiative, rooted in principles of neutrality and non-alignment, underscored India's pursuit of autonomy and sovereignty in the international arena. Building upon this legacy of forward-thinking diplomacy, the adoption of a feminist foreign policy emerges as a contemporary imperative, offering multifaceted advantages both domestically and internationally (Khillare 2023).

The examination of achievements and obstacles faced by Indian women diplomats incorporates intersectionality by analysing that economic, conflict-related, and cultural factors impact women's roles in diplomacy (Banerjee, Ghosh 2018). It also emphasises the importance of embracing a FFP in India. The FFP seeks to enhance the well-being of marginalised groups, foster peace, advocate for inclusive policies, and address gender-based discrimination concerns (Khullar 2021). This policy framework challenges the global division of labour that marginalises women and promotes women's participation in political leadership and decision-making, leading to a more nuanced understanding of gender through an intersectional lens (Patel 2023).

Internally, the integration of feminist principles into India's foreign policy framework holds the promise of fostering intersectional inclusivity (Khillare 2023). By acknowledging and addressing the interconnectedness of gender with other axes of identity such as caste, class, ethnicity, and religion, a feminist

approach can facilitate the creation of more equitable and representative foreign policy strategies. This internal restructuring is poised to not only enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of India's diplomatic endeavours but also align them more closely with the nation's democratic ethos and constitutional commitments to equality and social justice.

Externally, a feminist foreign policy positions India to engage more progressively with a comprehensive spectrum of regional and global gender issues (Khillare 2023). By prioritising the promotion of gender equality, women's rights, and empowerment on the international stage, India can contribute meaningfully to global efforts aimed at advancing gender justice and inclusivity. Such engagement extends beyond conventional diplomatic channels to encompass collaborations in areas such as climate action, Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR), and economic and development cooperation (Khillare 2023). Through these avenues, India can leverage its diplomatic capital to advocate for policies and initiatives that prioritise the needs and concerns of marginalised gender groups, thereby fostering more equitable and inclusive forms of global governance.

One of the paramount advantages of embracing a feminist foreign policy lies in its potential to redress historical disparities in representation, resource allocation, and access to opportunities within the realm of international relations. By prioritising the perspectives and priorities of women and marginalised gender identities, India stands to harness the full potential of its diverse population as agents of change and progress in the global arena. Moreover, by addressing the systemic barriers that have traditionally hindered women's participation in diplomacy and foreign policy decision-making, India can cultivate a more dynamic and responsive diplomatic apparatus capable of navigating the complex challenges of the twenty-first century. adoption of a feminist foreign policy represents a natural evolution of India's progressive diplomatic tradition, aligning with its core values of democracy, pluralism, and social justice. By integrating feminist principles into its foreign policy framework, India can not only enhance its standing as a champion of gender equality and human rights but also contribute meaningfully to the collective endeavour of building a more just, inclusive, and



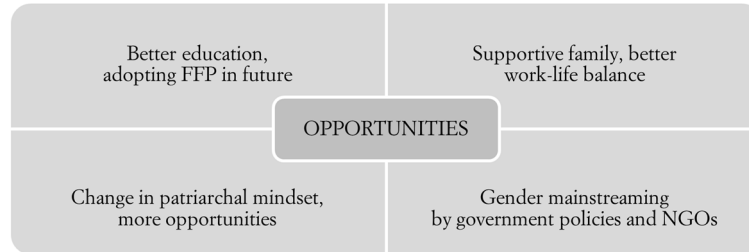


Fig. 4. *Opportunities for women in Indian diplomacy.*

equitable world order. Figure 4 recommends the measures that should be taken for Indian women diplomats to have an ocean of opportunities in front of them.

KEY FINDINGS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Recognising the importance of gender equality and women empowerment in diplomacy, this section aims to evaluate the key findings and implications of the present research and to propose actionable policy recommendations for enhancing the participation and representation of women in Indian diplomacy. The key findings of the study are the following: *a) Underrepresentation of women.* The research identifies a significant underrepresentation of women in Indian diplomatic ranks, particularly in senior leadership positions. Despite progress in recent years, women remain disproportionately represented in diplomatic roles, limiting their influence and contributions to foreign policy decision-making; *b) Systemic challenges.* Structural barriers such as gender bias, stereotypes, and entrenched patriarchal norms within diplomatic institutions hinder women's advancement in the field. Intersectionality amplifies these challenges, contributing to a hostile work environment and hindering women's career progression; *c) Limited policy focus.* The study highlights a lack of concerted policy efforts and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and women's participation in Indian diplomacy. Existing policies often lack adequate implementation mechanisms and fail to address the specific

needs and concerns of women diplomats; *d) Potential opportunities.* Despite the challenges, the research identifies several opportunities for enhancing women's participation in Indian diplomacy, including increased political will, growing public awareness, and the potential for strategic partnerships with international organisations and civil society actors.

The policy recommendations for India concerning the present study are: *a) Gender-responsive policies.* Develop and implement gender-responsive policies within diplomatic institutions to address systemic barriers and promote gender equality. This includes establishing gender quotas for diplomatic appointments, providing targeted training and mentorship programs for women diplomats, and creating a supportive work environment free from discrimination and harassment; *b) Leadership development.* Invest in leadership development programs specifically tailored to women diplomats, equipping them with the necessary skills and resources to advance their careers and assume leadership roles within the diplomatic corps. This includes initiatives such as leadership training, networking opportunities, and mentorship programs facilitated by senior women diplomats; *c) Promoting gender mainstreaming.* Integrate gender mainstreaming principles into foreign policy formulation and implementation processes, ensuring that gender perspectives are systematically incorporated into diplomatic initiatives and decision-making processes. This requires training and capacity-building for diplomats on gender-sensitive approaches and the integration of gender analysis into policy frameworks; *d) Tackling intersectionality.* Balancing religious identity with their professional responsibilities poses significant challenges for women diplomats, particularly within societies where religious affiliation is deeply intertwined with cultural and national identity. To address intersectionality within gender dynamics in Indian diplomacy, the minority identity of women can be strategically leveraged. For example, when engaging with predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East, an Indian Muslim woman diplomat can serve as a pivotal figure. Her shared religious background with counterparts from these nations can facilitate smoother negotiations and foster a sense of familiarity and ease, thereby enhancing diplomatic



relations; *e) Advocacy and awareness campaigns.* Launch advocacy and awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes, promote positive role models, and raise public awareness about the importance of gender equality in diplomacy. Engage with media, civil society organisations, and educational institutions to foster a culture of gender sensitivity and inclusion within society; *f) International collaboration.* Strengthen collaboration with international organisations, regional forums, and other countries to exchange best practices, share experiences, and advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment in diplomacy. This includes participating in multilateral initiatives such as the United Nations Women, the Commonwealth, and regional platforms focused on gender equality and women's rights.

CONCLUSION

Gender parity has been absent in Indian diplomacy ever since the beginning, to the extent that Indian diplomacy was completely male-dominated before 1947. It was only in independent India that the women got their long-due opportunity and the right to enter into the all-India services. After the scrapping of Rule 8(2) of the Indian Foreign Service (Conduct and Discipline) Rules of 1961 and Rule 18(4) of Indian Foreign Service (Recruitment, Cadre Seniority and Promotion) Rules of 1961, which empowered the government to call for the resignation of a female officer after marriage on the ground of efficiency, the numerical strength of women who pursue the IFS has increased. Women diplomats have been facing challenges over the years, which are discussed in the paper, along with steps the government has taken to overcome them. The United Nations has also been cited for its global efforts.

The emergence of novel concepts in IR such as the FFP and its adoption by some countries such as Sweden, Canada, France etc. has been exemplary and opened new doors of empowerment of women in general. These global developments have great avenues for the empowerment of Indian women diplomats as well, if and when India takes measures towards adopting such a policy which is progressive and caters to the needs of the hour. The overarching conclusion drawn from the paper



underscores the substantial strides made by Indian women diplomats, especially in recent years, with an appreciable rise in their occupancy of pivotal roles within diplomatic circles.

The initiatives taken by government and NGOs have been instrumental in fostering gender inclusivity in Indian diplomacy by advocating for women's rights, providing education and vocational training, supporting women's self-help groups, and offering legal aid. Despite persisting obstacles hindering the attainment of full gender parity, Indian women diplomats have admirably shattered the proverbial glass ceiling. The realisation of their full potential depends upon the sustenance of a positive, inclusive, and supportive institutional framework which addresses intersectional challenges. With such conducive conditions, their contributions to diplomacy are poised to garner further acclaim, serving as a testament to their capabilities on the global stage.

The imperative to address extant challenges and capitalise on opportunities for women in Indian diplomacy necessitates a comprehensive and coordinated policy approach. By instituting gender-responsive measures, nurturing leadership capabilities, advancing gender mainstreaming efforts, conducting advocacy initiatives, and fostering international collaboration, India stands ready to empower women diplomats effectively, thereby propelling the nation's foreign policy objectives forward in a manner that is both inclusive and equitable.

NOTES

¹ The report *Gender Responsive Approaches to Foreign Policy and the 2030 Agenda Feminist Foreign Policies* (United Nations Women 2023: 2) qualifies the principles of FFPs as: *a*) transformative and systematic; *b*) intersectional; *c*) post-colonial and anti-racist; *d*) collaborative and inclusive; *e*) cross-cutting and coherent.

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